THE PHENOMENON OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND POLYGAMY IN THE CAZIN KRAJINA DURING THE 20TH CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this ethnological study is the deconstruction of the complex socio-cultural mechanisms that shaped the private and family life of the inhabitants of the Cazin Krajina region during the 20th century. By focusing on the dynamics of intra-family violence and the historical phenomenon of polygamy, this paper aims to shed light on the tensions between proclaimed religious norms, customary law, and the harsh economic reality of the isolated Krajina area. Through an analysis of oral history, court records, and folkloric material, the study offers a critical insight into the transformation processes of traditional society and the tenacity of patriarchal atavisms in their encounter with the modernization trends of the past century.

1. Structure and Cosmic Legitizimation of the Traditional Krajina Family

From a structural and cosmic perspective, the familial and social hierarchy of dominance in the traditional Krajina environment was precisely divided through the principles of vertical subordination. The people, as a collective, submit to the divine will, which—despite the Qur'anic principle of tawhid (monotheism) and the absolute transcendence of anthropomorphic characteristics—underwent a process of androcentric anthropomorphization within the frameworks of folkloric (folk) Islamized syncretism.

"God first created a beard for Himself, and then for man."

From the perspective of ethnolinguistics and semiotics, this saying is by no means accidental. Namely, the traditional concept of gerontocracy and accumulated social knowledge was shaped exclusively through the form of oral history and the didactic discourse of older men. In collective memory, they function as a recognizable archetype of the "grandfather with a long white beard" who teaches younger generations social norms through narrative patterns. On the other hand, a conspicuous androcentric oblivion is identified in the local culture of remembrance—a total absence of matrifocal narrative authorities or social recognition of the wisdom of older women.

The earthly exponents of divine authority were distributed through a rigid patriarchal and patrilineal pyramid, where the sacred domain was represented by the authority of the effendi (hodža), while the secular was led by the figure of the father as the pater familias. Female subordination to man within this system was legitimized through religious rationalization and the sacralization of social subordination:

"If your husband hates you, God hates you too."

"Even to God, a female is not dear."

For a girl or woman who displayed subversive behavior toward the patriarchal order, society applied mechanisms of verbal stigmatization and social marginalization. Yet, the most eloquent example of the radical dehumanization and depersonalization of woman as a human being is contained in the folkloric formula:

"A female is worse than an animal."

Within the family structure, children—with a special emphasis on sons as carriers of patrilineal continuity (the lineage and family name)—were subject to the obligation of unconditional filial piety toward their parents. The position of the mother in this context represents a specific phenomenon of paradoxical power: through the sacralization of motherhood, a woman within the patriarchy achieves a compensatory, matrifocal dominance over her male offspring.

The traditional pattern of ultimogeniture (the customary law according to which the youngest son inherits the parental hearth) also implied the imperative of gerontophilia—a lifelong moral and economic care for the parents, encapsulated in the imperative:

"A son must take care of his mother."

The mythopoetic function of narratives in the Cazin Krajina often serves as a mechanism for the etiological explanation of natural phenomena, but also as a means of social prophylaxis and social control. This is excellently reflected in the local etiological myth about the appearance of the Moon. The dark spots on the lunar surface are interpreted through the concept of divine retribution (punishment) and the taboos surrounding disobedience toward parents.

A mythological son who, in a fit of rage, raised his hand against his mother suffered immediate transcendental retribution—he was slain by Allah's will, while the act itself was codified in the geomorphological configuration of the Moon's surface. In folk reception, lunar craters function as a pareidolic depiction of an anthropomorphic figure with a raised hand, thus becoming a permanent visual memento and a warning to the community.

This myth possesses a distinct didactic-pedagogical function within the process of primary socialization. Paradoxically, although it reinforces the power of the mother, the myth was most frequently transmitted by the mothers themselves, using it as a discourse of intimidation and a psychological-preventative mechanism. Here, the Moon ceases to be merely an astral object and becomes a sacralized medium; the celestial sphere offers empirical, "material proof" of the inevitability of divine punishment for violating the familial and cosmic order. Thereby, the principle of filial piety is externalized from the domain of private right and elevated to the level of cosmic law.

FOOTNOTES

(1) Historical and anthropological analysis shows that the legitimation of male violence against women possesses deep civilizational roots. The right to punish, and even execute, a wife or daughter without legal consequences (or with minimal sanctions) was held by fathers, husbands, and brothers in many European legal systems until the modern era. In the Middle East and the traditional societies of the Mediterranean, this right was often translated into the form of proverbs and "wisdom" (e.g., "Beat your wife constantly. If you don't know why, she knows"). Similar patterns are recorded in the Western European folkloric fund, such as the old English saying: "The more you beat a dog, a walnut tree, and a woman—the better they will be".

This latent and open conflict of the sexes, viewed from the perspective of the late 20th century, enters a phase of intensification due to emancipatory struggles for complete legal and social equality. Growing awareness of the problem of domestic violence also resulted in institutional responses; the first specialized shelter (safe house) for abused women and children was founded in 1971 in London, and by the end of the decade, that number grew to fifty in Great Britain, alongside the parallel establishment of similar institutions in France, Ireland, West Germany, Australia, and the USA. (See

further in: Bogoljub Lacmanović, Brak bez prstena, Zagreb, 1979, p. 57. Note: The author's original text states the surname Lacković, but it refers to the cited work of Bogoljub Lacmanović).

2. Gender Devaluation and the Phenomenon of "Someone Else's Dinner": The Passive Role of the Primary Family in Violence

Within the internal hierarchy of traditional society in the Cazin Krajina, misogynistic attitudes toward the female sex manifested from earliest childhood and permeated all generational layers. The depth of the internalization of this inferior status is evidenced by the fact that even older women (nanas) reproduced the discourse of their own lesser value. A widespread maxim in the local idiom was:

"Even the youngest male child is older than a nana."

This phrase clearly indicates that the male sex, regardless of biological age and absence of life experience, was structurally positioned above any female figure, demanding explicit respect and submissiveness even from elderly women.

One of the key systemic errors of patriarchal socialization was reflected in the continuous and intentional instillation of a sense of transience in female children. Daughters were constantly reminded from early childhood that they belonged to "someone else's house" and were "someone else's dinner" (tuđa večera), meaning that their stay in the parental home was merely temporary until the moment of marriage. The primary concern of parents was to marry off a daughter as quickly as possible so she would leave the household, which essentially represented a strategy for the economic and social relief of the family.

This cultural matrix had fatal consequences for the safety of women in marriage. The highest percentage of domestic violence was enabled precisely by the passive stance of the victim's parents. In moments of escalating husbandly brutality, the primary family rarely provided refuge for their daughter. On the contrary, parents often forced the woman to endure physical and psychological abuse, guided by a rigid social imperative:

"Endure it, it is a shame to return home. I endured it too!"

The fear of social stigma, condemnation by the community, and the tarnishing of family honor ("face" / obraz) was superior to the physical integrity and life of their own child. The return of a divorced or separated woman to the parental home was perceived as an unforgivable economic and social disgrace, thereby hermetically sealing the victim inside a cycle of marital violence with no possibility of escape.

Due to this specific cultural matrix and pronounced forms of oppression, a specific negative discourse about the Cazin Krajina formed in the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina—particularly in the central and eastern regions—where a widespread saying emerged: "one wouldn't give even a cat to the Krajina, let alone their own daughter."

3. The Warrior Ethos and the Gender Segregation of Labor

In the area of the Cazin Krajina—which for centuries functioned under the specific socio-historical conditions of the Military Frontier (Militärgrenze)—a specific warrior ethos was formed. Within this cultural model, the cult of productive agricultural labor among men (especially within the Bosniak socio-cultural corpus) remained long underdeveloped. An archaic model of rigid gender segregation of labor, characteristic of militarized communities, was in effect: the role of warrior, defender, and hunter

(the sphere of public action and defense) belonged primarily to the man, while the entire domain of agricultural production and domestic economy was left to the woman (2). These historically sedimented behavioral patterns persisted as atavisms deep into the 20th century, crucially influencing the structuring of intra-family relations.

Ethnographic and legal sources from the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as well as the first decades of socialist Yugoslavia, confirm the remarkable tenacity of this model. The man participated minimally in the agrarian sector, while the woman was the primary carrier of agricultural production.

3.1. Male Leisure as a Status Symbol and Economic Parasitism

In contrast to the grueling labor of women, male identity was constructed through ritualized leisure and mobility in the public sphere. The man was a constant visitor to market days (pazars) in his county (srez), but also in neighboring regions, often without any economic need or purpose. In addition to weekly markets, the spaces for male socialization and the demonstration of status were the annual fairs (festivals). This inclination toward the non-functional spending of time in the public sphere is illustrated by the fact that before World War II, peasants would waste entire days passively observing the work of state commissions in the field.

Such dynamics resulted in the extreme exploitation of female labor and the instability of marital unions, which is clearly reflected in the judicial practice of that era. An analysis of court records from the mid-20th century (archived in the Yearbook of the Faculty of Law in Sarajevo, 1955) clearly deconstructs the mechanisms of economic and physical oppression against women:

Instrumentalization and Seasonal Discarding: The woman is perceived exclusively as seasonal labor and is driven away when the field work subsides: “He would call me in the summer for field work, and as soon as the work was done, he would drive me away again” (Cases: 246/46, 250/46, 424/46, 380/47).

Absolute Asymmetric Labor Relationship: “I did all the field work and he did nothing” (Case: 267/46).

Loss of Labor Capacity as Grounds for Expulsion: The phenomenon of exploiting a woman's reproductive and productive health is highly pronounced. When a woman loses her biological functionality due to multiple births and heavy labor, she is subjected to banishment: “I gave birth to 10 children with him and because of that I became weak and am no longer capable of working, so he persecutes me for not working, and I left him” (Case: 111/49). Another woman states a similar reason: “I cannot work because I am old, so I left him” (Velika Kladuša, Case: 80/51).

Destructive Forms of Male Behavior: Leisure combined with vices further eroded the family fabric: “The defendant does not like to work, but gambles instead” (Bihać, Case: 364/50).

FOOTNOTES

(2) An illustrative example of the tenacity of these patterns is visible even in the contemporary context of the Cazin Krajina, where agricultural work in the household (such as working in the family garden/yard) is traditionally still dominantly perceived as an exclusively female domain, while male engagement in this segment is often subjected to social stigmatization and ridicule. This example clearly demonstrates a distinct cultural lag—a phenomenon of slow transformation of the collective mentality and the elimination of social atavisms. From this, it follows that alongside ethnological

research, it is necessary to intensify information and educational processes, especially through the media, with the aim of deconstructing and transforming the dominant public discourse. Social prejudices of this kind long-term weaken social cohesion, directly disrupting the security, existential, and economic segments of the community. From an anthropological perspective, communities burdened with deep gender prejudices show symptoms of structural and cultural dysfunctionality, which significantly slows down and hinders the processes of their comprehensive modernization. (Godišnjak Pravnog fakulteta u Sarajevu / Yearbook of the Faculty of Law in Sarajevo, Volumes III-IV, Sarajevo, 1955).

4. Exploitation of Female Labor and the Denial of Autonomy: Testimony from Primary Sources

The economic instrumentalization of offspring within the patriarchal code was not limited exclusively to agricultural labor within the local community; it also encompassed the external exploitation of young labor through wage-earning and seasonal work in more developed Yugoslav republics. Parental authority, reinforced by rigid customary law, maintained absolute control over financial flows and individual autonomy even after children became economically active outside their home region.

This pattern of financial expropriation and the complete subordination of female offspring is vividly illustrated by an oral testimony from family history, which carries significant ethnographic weight and serves as a representative sample of a broader social phenomenon:

“According to the testimony of my mother, who as a young girl went to Slovenia to work in the kitchen of a restaurant in Bled, her father would arrive every month at the time of payday. He would take her entire salary, appropriate it for himself, and then return back to the Krajina.”

This narrative fully exposes the position of the female child as a mere economic resource for the primary family. Even under conditions of external migration and apparent emancipation through entry into the sphere of paid, industrialized labor, the young woman remains deprived of the basic right to dispose of the fruits of her own labor. The funds she earned were automatically redirected into the primary family budget under the exclusive control of the pater familias.

This inherited code of behavior, which patriarchy provided with institutional and cultural shelter, reproduced family relations for decades within which individuals remained deprived of basic parental empathy and affective support. Chronic deprivation of emotional warmth, accompanied by a constant sense of utilitarian exploitation, deeply affected the psychological framework of the individual. This generated permanent wounds in the affective and intimate spheres of adult members of the community, which long-term determined their later marital and parental roles.

5. Transgenerational Trauma and the Socio-Economic Context of Resource Scarcity

For a comprehensive anthropological and sociological understanding of the escalation of domestic violence and affective coldness in the Cazin Krajina, it is essential to apply the concept of transgenerational (intergenerational) trauma. The phenomenon of heightened aggressiveness in the private sphere cannot be observed in isolation from chronic economic deprivation, the underdevelopment of the agrarian structure, and the historical turbulence that plagued this region during the first half and mid-20th century.

The socio-cultural milieu between the two world wars, as well as the early post-war period (especially the 1950s), was marked by extreme poverty, crop failure, and famine. Oral testimonies from the oldest inhabitants of the Cazin Krajina depict dramatic biological survival strategies, such as grinding tree bark or dried, husked corn cobs (oklasci or čutaci) and mixing them with minimal amounts of flour to artificially increase the quantity of food. The peak of this socio-economic and political crisis manifested in the historical event known as the Cazin Rebellion (1950), which represented the only mass, open armed uprising of the peasantry against collectivization and the rigid system of mandatory grain purchase in socialist Yugoslavia.

In such an environment of constant struggle for existence, traditional families functioned as large economic cooperatives with five, ten, or more offspring. Paradoxically, a high birth rate correlated with poverty, which produced a chronic lack of food, adequate care, and basic emotional warmth within the family microcosm. Vera St. Erlich, in her classic study (1971), brings an idyllic but analytically indicative description of a Bosnian cooperative (zadruga) from the vicinity of Jajce (1940), which faithfully reflects the structure of a typical family community of that era:

“One married couple had nine small children; the mother was the second wife to her husband, and he was her second husband. The children—from three marriages—looked as if they were all the same age. The mother herself gave birth to eight children, but four of them died; she is now nursing the youngest and expecting another... In the small room where a dozen of them sleep, there is nothing but a loom... A little hut nearby has unlevelled stone instead of a floor.” [1]

Although the author detects apparent contentment among the parents in her record, a deeper anthropological analysis of this and similar models reveals permanent, cumulative stress. Within such structures, children were instrumentalized primarily as free labor. The number of offspring directly correlated with the economic capacity of the household: a larger number of children meant more working hands for tending livestock (especially sheep) and cultivating agricultural land (dunums of fields).

This economic coercion gave rise to the phenomenon of external exploitation and the parentification of young children through placing them into service (hire or lease)—a practice colloquially referred to as “going to the kaures” (the non-Muslim lands) or “among the karavlachs”, which involved sending minors to the territory of neighboring Croatia or to wealthier local landowners. These children performed heavy physical labor in exchange for monetary compensation that was paid directly to their parents. The accommodation, nutrition, and general treatment of these hired children were frequently psychophysically degrading. Emotional detachment from the primary family, the denial of the right to education, and the exploitation of child labor generated a deep sense of inferiority, permanent frustration, and low levels of self-esteem, which were transgenerationally transmitted to subsequent generations in adulthood.

Within such a value system, the physical punishment of children was normatively accepted and culturally sanctioned through folk proverbs and religious-educational maxims that found legitimacy for violence within metaphysical frameworks:

“The switch came out of paradise.”

“Where a mother strikes, the hellfire (Jahannam) will not burn that part of the body.”

“A child should be beaten with a hazel switch to be healthy.”

“Give him one behind the ears, nothing will happen to him.”

“She (he) just needs a good beating and will become good immediately.”

This rigid educational doctrine, combined with the economic traumas of scarcity and the instrumentalization of the child's body, created a closed loop of intra-family aggression. Emotional coldness and physical coercion, internalized in childhood, manifested in adulthood through brutal patterns of marital relations and domestic violence that are extensively documented in 20th-century judicial practice.

REFERENCES / FOOTNOTES

[1] Vera St. Erlich, Jugoslovenska porodica u transformaciji: Studija u tri stotine sela, Zagreb, Liber, 1971, p. 112.

6. Non-Marital Coercion: Bride Abduction and Marital Irregularity

The dysfunctionality and subsequent violence within the marital unions of the observed region were not generated exclusively by the institution of polygamy and arranged marriages, but also by the widespread practice of nolle prosequi / violent bride abductions (otmice djevojaka). This deviant phenomenon, which was frequently treated euphemistically in customary law as a traditional form of entering into marriage, was clearly unmasked in the post-war criminal-legal system and judicial practice as an act of severe physical and psychological coercion.

Data published in the Yearbook of the Faculty of Law of the University of Sarajevo (1955) explicitly document the cruelty to which young girls were exposed during their forced assimilation into a new family community. Within the analyzed 29 court cases dealing with the issue of women abduction, brutal behavioral patterns manifest, often aided and abetted by male members of the abductor's primary family:

“One of them states how the defendant, together with his brother, dragged her by force and even beat her, for which his brother was subsequently convicted” (Velika Kladuša, Case: 466/51).

Abductions were frequently executed under direct death threats, where the transgenerational transmission of domestic violence was utilized as a psychological instrument to break the victim's resistance. Fear for one's own life and the projected pathological family scenarios of ancestors compelled the girls to capitulate, which is vividly illustrated by the following archival excerpt from judicial practice:

“With a revolver in his hand, he told me: 'If you do not come to my house this instant, this rain will wash away our blood.' And since my mother had told me that his father had also shot at his mother and then committed suicide out of jealousy, I went with him out of fear for my life” (Case: 148/52).

Such traumatic introductory modalities of marriage represented a distillate of pathological family relations within which the woman was, from the very beginning, positioned as a form of spoils of war (ratni plijen) rather than an equal marital partner. A violent entry into marriage automatically determined an asymmetric power dynamic, making the woman permanently vulnerable to all subsequent forms of intra-family abuse.

REFERENCES / FOOTNOTES

Vera St. Erlich, U društvu s čovjekom: Odabrani tekstovi, Zagreb, Naprijed, 1971, p. 112. (Note: Here you can adjust the exact page number from your edition of Vera St. Erlich's book if necessary). Godišnjak Pravnog fakulteta u Sarajevu / Yearbook of the Faculty of Law in Sarajevo, Volumes III-IV, Sarajevo, 1955, pp. 248-252.

7. Arranged Marriages and the Role of Parental Authority

In order to comprehend the causal chain leading to permanent aggression in the private sphere, the phenomenon must be observed through the prism of the institution of arranged and forced marriages. Individual desire and emotional compatibility within the traditional society of the Cazin Krajina were absolutely subordinate to the interests of the broader family cooperative (zadruga) and the authority of the pater familias. Divorce lawsuits from the mid-20th century reveal that parents—guided by economic interests, property calculations, or intra-family alliances—systematically coerced young individuals into unions entirely devoid of any affective foundation.

Quantitative data from the analyzed material demonstrate that in as many as 95 observed court cases, spouses explicitly complain that they entered into marriage against their own will, under rigid and direct pressure from their primary family. Archival sources illustrate these processes through the destinies of male members of the community who severed the imposed marital ties only after the elimination or death of the authoritarian father figure, which clearly deconstructs the mechanisms of economic blackmail and existential dependence:

“...one husband [...] states that he concluded the marriage at the request of his father, and as soon as his father died, he fled from home and abandoned his wife” (Case: 75/48).

“I entered into the marriage against my will, but I had to live with her, because otherwise my father would have kicked me out of the house; when my father died, I abandoned her” (Case: 69/49).

The role of female kin (mothers and stepmothers) in mediating and imposing marital partners was also highly pronounced. This data points to the phenomenon of the internalization of patriarchy, where women—although historical victims of the oppressive system themselves—become active agents and reproduce the same violent pattern over their own offspring to preserve family status, economic stability, or complex kinship networks:

“Another states that her mother is his stepmother, so the parents mediated the conclusion of the marriage” (Case: 51/49).

“My father and stepmother forced me to marry her because she is closely related to my stepmother. Otherwise, I do not love her, so I went to work in Istra,” one husband defends himself (Case: 99/52).

This final example excellently illustrates the strategy of external migration (leaving to work in Istra) as a form of spatial and emotional escape from imposed marital dysfunctionality. Arranged marriages thus functioned as primary incubators of permanent frustration. The lack of basic empathy between the enforced spouses, in synergy with geographic isolation and the economic pressures of the agrarian environment, constituted the key catalyst for the subsequent escalation of extreme domestic violence that deeply scarred the everyday life of the Krajina during the past century.

8. Social Pathology and the Stigmatization of Female Infertility

Within the rigid patriarchal coordinate system of the traditional Cazin Krajina, a woman's social role was determined primarily through two strictly utilitarian functions: reproductive capacity (bearing male offspring to ensure the patrilineal continuity of the lineage and provide labor) and manual labor (performing domestic chores and heavy agricultural work). A failure to achieve fulfillment within the domain of procreation generated extreme forms of social exclusion, transforming a childless

woman into a social outcast—a persona non grata.

In crisis-ridden socio-economic periods, when the biological survival of the community was threatened by resource scarcity, infertile women were perceived as an economic burden, given that they consumed the meager resources of the agrarian community without contributing to its demographic and labor reproduction. Although this radical collective consciousness gradually transformed through modernization trends in the second half of the 20th century, historical discourse reveals a high degree of brutality toward the phenomenon of female sterility.

Antun Hangi, in his pioneering ethnographic work The Life and Customs of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1906), documents this harsh, utilitarian view of female infertility, where a female body devoid of reproductive function is metaphorically equated with unproductive nature that must be eliminated:

“A woman who does not bear children is hateful to her husband, even if she was once very dear to him. He considers her a tree without fruit, a rose without a blossom; she must, therefore, be cut down.” [1]

This cultural matrix was deeply rooted in both oral tradition and familial rhetoric, where the brother-in-law (djever), as an exponent of the male kin line, warns the bride with verses that imply the fatal consequences of sterility:

“Look, bride, at those yellow oranges. If the orange did not bear fruit every year, Brother would have cut it down long ago.”

“Look, bride, at that yellow lemon. If the lemon did not bear fruit every year, Brother would have cut it down long ago. Look, bride, at the red rose. If the rose did not bloom every year, Brother would have cut it down long ago.” [1]

In folk creativity and family narratives, the absence of offspring nullified even a husband's high affective affinity or a woman's elevated economic status. Hangi records a paradigmatic example of an aga/beg who, due to his wife's infertility, orders her physical liquidation as an act of retribution for an unfulfilled contractual condition of the marriage:

“O, by God, brother Muhamed! I am leaving for the new Timars. When the young bride comes to you, Lead her, young as she is, into the hazard garden. And there, cut the young one down. Since I have no child from my heart, Let me not have her either.” [1]

The pressure from the intra-female social network was equally oppressive. At women's gatherings (sijelos), the status of a childless woman was permanently devalued, as illustrated by a dialogue in which material well-being and a husband's attentiveness lose their value in the face of community condemnation:

The young wife of Mustaj-beg boasts to her friends at a sijelo about how much her husband loves her, saying: “If you only knew, my dear friends, How my Mustaj-beg treats me?! When I sleep, he waves a pearl branch, He wakes me with a lilac branch: Wake up, my soul, the sun has risen...”

But one of them rebukes her: “In vain are your praise and your property, When you have no child from your heart.” [1]

Ethnological and sociological research from the second half of the 20th century confirms that infertility was one of the primary structural causes for introducing the institution of polygamy (inoćanstvo) or for the unilateral termination of the marital union. In Vera St. Erlich's extensive study, The Yugoslav Family in Transformation

(1971), based on field data from the counties of Bosanska Krajina, it is explicitly stated:

“Husbands immediately look for a second wife to have children, because polygamy is legalized.” (Cazin County) [2]

In the agro-cultural mentality, metaphysical and ominous components were attributed to sterility, whereby an infertile woman was demonized and treated as a source of misfortune and bad luck (baksuzluk). In the Čajniče county, a stance was recorded that “an infertile woman is considered the greatest bad luck. They believe it is a divine punishment,” while it was believed that so-called barren women lacked “any heartfelt mercy toward anyone.”

This superstitious demonization directly reflected on the economic aspects of daily life through magical prohibitions. In the Velika Kladuša area, a belief was documented: “It is not good to give fruits from the garden to a lone person (a childless woman) because then you will have no prosperity in your garden.” While in other confessional communities the impossibility of divorce forced an infertile woman into a bleak survival within a hostile family environment (“in other confessions, they can hardly wait for her to die because divorce is difficult”), in the Muslim context of the Cazin Krajina, Sharia and customary mechanisms enabled the swift substitution of an infertile woman with a new, reproductively capable wife.

9. The Intimate Sphere and Sexuality in the Clutches of Reproductive Utilitarianism

The emotional coldness generated in the primary family through primary socialization processes projected directly onto the marital bed, transforming intimate life into a space of mechanical reproduction and power asymmetry. According to the testimonies of the oldest population, primarily women who witnessed marital relations from the mid-20th century, partner life was almost entirely devoid of tenderness, erotic reciprocity, and emotional exchange. The sexual segment of marriage was treated exclusively through the prism of procreation and the satisfaction of the male libido, while female sexuality was systemically suppressed and tabooed.

The harsh and naturalistic side of this aspect of marital life is best illustrated by an authentic statement from a deceased female resident within the primary ethnographic material, who describes the complete dehumanization of the female body in the intimate act through animalistic metaphors:

“He behaved as if we were livestock; he would mount me like a bull, do the job in silence, finish, get off me, and turn his back to me.”

From the perspective of feminist anthropology, it is evident that most women of that era did not experience orgasm, nor did they possess a cognitive construct within the existing cultural code that such a physical and emotional experience even existed. The strict rules of patriarchy constructed a rigid dichotomy: a woman could either be a passive, submissive mother/wife, or, in the case of displaying any sexual freedom, desire, or initiative, she would automatically receive the social label of a loose woman. This informal moral policing within the community served as an effective mechanism for controlling the female body, ensuring that the woman remained a passive object of phallocentric dominance.

Despite the normativized female submissiveness, archival judicial practice in the Cazin Krajina region from the mid-20th century also documents cases of female sexual subversion or resistance to marital cohabitation. According to the available insight into judicial practice from 1955, in three analyzed cases, the husband complains

about the denial of sexual relations by the wife. These examples vividly illustrate marital dysfunctionality and spatial segregation within the household:

“She made her bed in the barn and did not want to be with me” (Case: 255/48). [3]

“She did not let me sleep with her: she slept in the bed and I under the bed” (Velika Kladuša, Case: 47/52). [3]

These isolated but highly indicative examples of passive resistance demonstrate that denying intimacy in the marital bed (whether by fleeing to spaces intended for livestock, such as a barn, or physically ejecting the husband from the bed) represented one of the few available instruments of female rebellion against imposed and unwanted marital unions.

REFERENCES / FOOTNOTES

[1] Antun Hangi, Život i običaji muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini, Second and revised edition, Sarajevo, Naklada Daniela A. Kajona, 1906, pp. 176-180. [2] Vera St. Erlich, Jugoslovenska porodica u transformaciji, Zagreb, Liber, 1971, pp. 234-238. [3] Godišnjak Pravnog fakulteta u Sarajevu / Yearbook of the Faculty of Law in Sarajevo, Volumes III-IV, Sarajevo, 1955, p. 254.

10. Intra-Family Dynamics: Violence as a Mechanism of Patriarchal Control

An analysis of archival material and divorce lawsuits from the mid-20th century (particularly in the counties of Cazin and Velika Kladuša) thoroughly demystifies the private sphere of these communities, revealing a high degree of structural and physical violence. Within the patriarchal code of the observed society, physical coercion against a woman was not perceived as a delict or a social anomaly, but rather as a legitimate, culturally normativized mechanism of discipline, pacification, and the maintenance of intra-family hierarchy.

Mutual physical confrontations between spouses belong to the order of causes most frequently cited in divorce lawsuits from this period. The patterns that dominated the Krajina subregion reflect the general matrix of the broader Dinaric cultural area: physical violence was recognized as a primary male prerogative, an instrument used to compel the wife into unconditional submission. Although documents record isolated cases in which a woman physically attacked her husband, or situations of mutual physical confrontations, in as many as 471 analyzed court files, this fact is cited as a circumstance that led to the absolute intolerability of joint life.

The fragments from court records vividly illustrate the harshness and inhumanity with which intra-family dynamics were constructed. In one case, it is stated that after a brutal beating, the husband “threw his wife down the stairs” (Case: 128/46), while in another, situations are documented where a husband beat his wife up to “five times a day” (Case: 179/46). The escalation of fear and psychological terror among the victims frequently produced suicidal impulses or extreme defensive reactions, as a result of which women threw themselves into wells or rivers in despair (Case: 19/46). Violence against women functioned through the syndrome of transgenerational transmission, passing as an informal inheritance from father to son, which is explicitly confirmed by the testimony of one of the plaintiffs:

“...and his father beat his mother, so I left him because of that” (Case: 70/48).

Brutality within this system frequently manifested during moments of extreme psychophysical vulnerability of the woman, such as illness or the puerperium (postpartum period). The exposed documents testify to a deep dehumanization:

“He beats her even at hours when he should be particularly attentive and gentle toward her. Thus, one beat his wife while she was lying sick (Case: 29/49), and another on the seventh day after childbirth (Case: 119/48).”

“It happens that husbands, in their fury, pull out their wives' hair” (Velika Kladuša, Case: 110/49).

“Thus, one beat his wife by tying her hands, and in bed, he would stand with his feet on her hands while slapping her cheeks with his hands. After that, he would drive her barefoot out into the snow” (Velika Kladuša, Case: 95/51).

These empirical data indicate that the female body in the observed socio-historical context served as a space for the permanent manifestation of male dominance. All frustrations caused by chronic resource scarcity, economic pressure, or personal dissatisfaction were channeled through brutal physical executions upon the subordinate member of the family, who was completely deprived of external legal and social protection.

11. Quantitative Analysis and Socio-Demographic Asymmetries of Divorce Lawsuits

For a deeper anthropological and sociological understanding of the transformation process of marital relations in the post-war period, an analysis of quantitative data on the distribution of divorce lawsuits in the broader area of Bosanska Krajina is of crucial importance. According to data published in the Yearbook of the Faculty of Law in Sarajevo (1955), a total of 3,244 divorce lawsuits were registered during the observed period, the territorial distribution of which reveals deep socio-demographic and cultural specificities of individual counties (srezovs):

A comparative analysis of these indicators points to a distinct disproportion between the total number of inhabitants and the frequency of initiating divorce disputes. While a linear proportion exists in the counties of Bosanski Petrovac, Drvar, and Bosansko Grahovo (a low number of inhabitants is followed by a proportionally low number of lawsuits), in the northwestern part of the region—within the historical-geographic core of the Cazin Krajina—this proportionality takes an inverse direction. The smaller the population of a county, the drastically higher the number of registered intra-family legal disputes. This phenomenon manifests most clearly in the comparative display of the Velika Kladuša and Cazin counties. Although the Cazin county was more populous at that moment by more than 11,000 inhabitants, absolutely the highest number of divorce cases was recorded in Velika Kladuša (888).

From an anthropological perspective, such socio-demographic asymmetries point to the phenomenon of geographic and migratory determinism. The configuration of the terrain and the geopolitical position of the Velika Kladuša county, which profiles itself in space as the immediate "gateway to Croatia" (meaning toward more developed economic centers), conditioned a significantly higher fluidity and mobility of the population. The proximity of the border and the constant fluctuation of people and goods contributed to the earlier penetration of external social influences, economic emancipation through seasonal work in neighboring regions, and consequently, a faster erosion of traditional patriarchal constraints. This social dynamics directly reflected on the rise of self-awareness and the readiness of the individual—but also of broader families—to resolve dysfunctional marital relations before official state institutions, rather than within closed traditional circles.

11.1. Subconcubinal Relationships ("Wild Marriages") and the Euphemization of Female Status

What is rarely explicitly stated in official state records is the fact that the practice of short-term extra-marital unions or subconcubinal relationships (colloquially known among the people as "wild marriages" / divlji brakovi) was extremely widespread in the Cazin Krajina. This phenomenon occurred when a girl entered the union voluntarily or through "abduction", spent a certain amount of time with the man, and then, due to discord or domestic violence, fled or was driven out without the marriage ever being legally (by a registrar) or Sharia-verified.

The broader community viewed these temporary unions with tacit approval. From the perspective of the traditional mentality, it was a semantically more acceptable option for the primary family to claim in public discourse before neighbors and relatives that their daughter had "married" rather than to admit that she had gone to live temporarily with a man without a formal contract. The seriality of these relationships and the ease of replacing partners from the male side is reflected in court testimonies:

“His current wife is his fifth in a row. He told me that he would change wives until he found one to his liking, and that he would remarry whenever he pleased” (Bihać District Court, Case: 23/49).

Characteristically, both men and women from these informal unions used terms in public communication that simulated a regular marital status (“I was married” / “Bio sam oženjen”, “Bila sam udana”). While from the male side this narrative served as a mechanism of self-legitimation, a proof of male libido, seductive skills, and sexual experience, for the woman this narrative represented a necessary defensive mechanism. Through the simulation of a marital past, the woman shielded herself from public condemnation and stigmatization that would otherwise label her a loose woman or harlot.

Despite this, social surveillance over the female body and behavior remained rigorous. Any woman who exited a marital union (whether formal or informal) was perceived as morally suspicious, and her movements and social contacts were under constant surveillance by the community. Any conversation with a man outside the closest family network automatically became a catalyst for public gossip and suspicion regarding the existence of new love affairs.

This deep cultural fear of stigmatization also produced a specific euphemization of social status. Although the official term "pušćenica" (divorced woman) existed in the language to designate a woman who had legally or customarily divorced, in everyday speech, the euphemism "udovica" (widow) was significantly more frequently used for divorced women, as well as for those who had exited informal "wild marriages". Even though this concept in basic terminology designates a woman whose spouse has passed away, its redirection toward divorced women served as a linguistic shield. By calling a divorced woman a widow, the community and family verbally removed her guilt for the collapse of the union (since a woman bears no responsibility for her husband's death), thus protecting her from radical social exclusion and preserving a minimum of her social standing in a conservative environment.

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Godišnjak Pravnog fakulteta u Sarajevu / Yearbook of the Faculty of Law in Sarajevo, Volumes III-IV, Sarajevo, 1955, pp. 242-246. (Note: These specific pages refer to the quantitative table and analysis of counties). Bihać District Court, case no. 23/49.

12. Terminological Definition and Legal Frameworks: The Sharia Marital System

In ethnological and anthropological science, polygamy (from the Greek πολυγαμία – marriage to multiple spouses) denotes a marital or partnership structure in which an

individual simultaneously has more than one spouse. Within this phenomenon, two primary forms are distinguished: polyandry (the marriage of one woman to multiple men), which represents an exceptionally rare cultural pattern, and polygyny (the marriage of one man to multiple women), which is historically significantly more widespread. It was precisely polygyny that constituted a recognizable element of marital relations in the broader area of Bosanska Krajina, and particularly in its westernmost part – the Cazin Krajina, during the first half of the 20th century.

For the scientific elucidation of this phenomenon, the ethnographic records of publicist and researcher Bogoljub Lacmanović are of crucial importance. From a socio-legal history perspective, the institution of multiple marriage on Yugoslav territory was formally and legally terminated only with the enactment of the federal Basic Law on Marriage in 1946, which introduced a strict principle of monogamy for all citizens, proclaiming that no one could contract a new marriage until their previous one had been legally dissolved.

Prior to this, during the Ottoman period, as well as within the constitutional-legal frameworks of Austria-Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes / Yugoslavia, autonomous Sharia family law applied to the Muslim population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In accordance with religious norms, this legal system permitted the formation of polygynous unions with a maximum of four lawful wives. Conceived as a type of private-law contract, Sharia marriage permitted the arrangement of unions even among minors. According to the norms of the time, marital maturity was recognized upon reaching 15 years of age, with exceptions that allowed the arrangement of marriage for biologically more developed boys from the age of 12 and girls from the age of 9.

12.1. Socio-Economic Aspects of Polygyny and the Institution of Mehr

A key element in the negotiation and contracting of a marriage was the institution of mehr – an obligatory bridal gift that the husband delivered to the woman or her family in the form of money or other material values. In an anthropological sense, mehr did not represent a mere commercialization or the "purchase" of a woman, but rather an economic guarantee of her autonomy. The woman possessed a legal instrument to deny marital cohabitation (coresidence) and obedience until the stipulated amount of mehr had been paid in full. The value of this dower depended directly on the social status, lineage, virginity, aesthetic attributes, and character of the girl.

Due to the heavy financial obligations imposed by the mehr, as well as the duty to maintain all wives, the right to polygyny was, in practice, exercised exclusively by the wealthier strata of the population. According to statistical data from 1910, approximately 1,000 Muslim men were registered in bigamous or polygamous unions (with two to four wives) across the territory of Bosanska Krajina. These individuals were primarily landowners, merchants, prominent artisans, cafe owners, and wealthier farmers. Alongside prestigious and estate-based status, the primary socio-economic driver of polygyny in rural environments was the need for the accumulation of unremunerated female labor within the family cooperative (zadruga).

12.2. Transformation and Survival of Customary Patterns in the Field

Although the 1926/1946 legal provisions eventually banned new polygamous marriages, the state recognized the legal validity of those unions that had been contracted prior to the enactment of the law. Field research conducted in March 1978 by Bihać-based journalist and chronicler Nurija Rošić, at the request of Bogoljub

Lacmanović, documented living examples of these pre-war Sharia marriages in the Cazin Krajina:

In the village of Ćoralići (municipality of Cazin), farmer Husnija Mulalić recorded over 35 years of cohabitation with two lawful wives in 1978.

Former merchant Ahmet Alagić from Cazin also lived in a bigamous union.

Merchant Hasan Jašić from Mala Kladuša (who passed away in 1976) left behind three wives who continued their cohabitation in a shared household.

Muhamed Nadarević (known as Muhan Rac) from the village of Lučka (Pećigrad, Cazin) maintained a union with four wives until near the end of his life.

From an ethnographic standpoint, the internal dynamics of these families were regulated by a strict customary protocol and a cyclical rotation of duties. The rule dictated that each wife, according to a fixed cyclical schedule, would care for the husband for a duration of one day and one night, with the shift usually occurring in the evening hours. These duties encompassed the preparation of dinner, making the bed, and the traditional ritual of bringing a basin of water for washing the husband's feet.

Although Rošić's interviews with contemporaries suggested a veneer of harmony and claims that the women generally got along well, a deeper psychological and social analysis exposes the dark side of this myth of domestic bliss. The subjective experience of emotional deprivation and intense social pressure manifested through the flight of women back to their primary families, while local oral traditions also record cases of women who metaphorically "died of shame," testifying to a profound internal fragmentation between imposed social norms and the victim's personal dignity.

13. Magical Antagonism: Ritual Practices as a Space of Intra-Female Struggle for Dominance

Coresidential relationships in the polygynous communities of the past frequently resulted in radical antagonism and latent conflicts between women. Deprived of external legal power and direct decision-making instruments within the patriarchal structure, wives attempted to harm one another by any means possible. The ultimate goal was the physical elimination of the rival from the shared household and the attainment of resource and affective dominance.

In this context, the figure of the inoća (the co-wife) frequently initiated specific forms of subversive action. To avoid direct social discredit and condemnation by her husband and the community, she concealed her open animosity, channeling it through occult and magical practices. From the rich corpus of oral traditions in the Cazin Krajina, it is well known that embittered women sought the services of local magical practitioners—occult specialists colloquially referred to as "babe" (old women) or witches—with the aim of destroying marital love and inducing sterility in the rival.

One of the basic rituals of sympathetic magic involved the manipulation of the victim's intimate undergarments. The magical practitioner would wrap seven grains of wheat and three grains of corn into the garment—symbols of fertility and abundance whose natural code was meant to be inverted. The bundle was then held over an open fire, undergoing partial burning while strictly guarded verbal formulas (bajalica or incantations) aimed at causing impotence or sterility were recited.

If the rival conceived before the co-wife could take destructive measures, the magical scenarios were redirected toward inducing a miscarriage. On the advice of older

women, rituals with distinct elements of necromancy were practiced. The co-wife would visit the local cemetery and conduct a cyclical gathering of flora from three key points of a grave: from the top (above the deceased's head), from the middle (where the arms rest), and from the bottom (above the feet). These botanical segments, infused with the symbolism of death and decay, were ground and clandestinely introduced into the pregnant rival's food. In parallel, the gathering of grave dirt was practiced, which was mixed with water and discreetly rubbed into the hems of the victim's clothing, aiming to invoke illness and the biological destruction of the fetus.

Whether the perpetrator acted autonomously or through the mediation of rural occult specialists, these actions possessed an explicitly malefic (harmful) nature, driven by the desire to destroy the rival. Even in cases where the pregnancy was not terminated, the co-wife would await the phase of the victim's highest psychophysical vulnerability—the act of childbirth and the postpartum period (babinje). Efforts were made to secure access to puerperal blood (postpartum blood), which in folk demonology was treated as a substance of extreme magical potency and a primary ingredient for concocting charms of permanent discord and strife.

Furthermore, through a simulation of empathy and care, the postpartum mother was offered maslenica (a traditional layered pastry) baked over dried plum branches (a tree symbolizing drying up and withering). According to the traditional beliefs of Bosnian women, the consumption of this ritual dish during the forty-day postpartum period (četrdesetnica—the first 40 days after childbirth, when the woman is culturally and biologically unprotected and susceptible to demonization) caused the rapid decline of the patient, loss of body mass, and extreme paleness of the face, thereby granting the magical antagonism within the polygamous home its full, destructive materialization.

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For a more detailed account of these examples and the chronology of family relations, see: Bogoljub Lacmanović, Brak bez prstena, Zagreb, 1979, p. 15.

14. Comparative Legal Context and the Internal Dynamics of Polygynous Marriages

For a comprehensive understanding of marital mobility in the Bosanska Krajina region, it is essential to elucidate the specificities of the autonomous Sharia system in relation to the canon laws of other confessional communities. In her comparative study on the transformation of the Yugoslav family, Vera St. Erlich (1971) highlights a legal mechanism that provided Muslim women with significantly greater institutional protection in cases of a husband's absence or external migration:

“Sharia courts, especially in Bosnia, allow women to remarry after one (or two) years of a husband's absence. Divorce is carried out through a summary procedure, as it is believed that a woman should not remain alone for too long. This practice places Muslim women in a much more favorable position than Bosnian Catholic or Orthodox women.”

However, although the legal framework facilitated swift judicial resolution, the actual internal dynamics within polygynous marriages and informal, extra-marital unions in the Cazin Krajina region were marked by power asymmetries, resource conflicts, and psychophysical coercion. An analysis of court records from the mid-20th century (archived in the Yearbook of the Faculty of Law in Sarajevo, 1955) deconstructs the pathology of intra-family relations through several characteristic models:

Violence as an Instrument for Introducing a Co-Wife: Men frequently utilized physical coercion to force the first wife to consent to a polygynous union, or to completely eliminate her after the community refused to approve a new marriage: “He beat me and drove me away so that he could enter into marriage with another, because they refused his request to marry a second wife alongside me” (Case: 26/46).

Serial Polygamy and Excessive Fluctuation of Partners: “He is driving me away to bring another; he is prone to changing wives: before me, he had one marital and two extra-marital partners” (Case: 96/53).

Establishment of Gynecocratic Dominance by the Younger Wife: In certain cases, the new (younger) wife assumed absolute control over the husband, completely marginalizing the older co-wife (inoća): “He does not dare say a single word because of the second wife” (Case: 138/46).

Economic and Labor Segregation Within the Household: The division of labor among co-wives often devolved into exploitation, where the privileged wife retained lighter, domestic duties, while the marginalized one was exposed to grueling agricultural labor: “He devotes all his attention to Ljubica, who does the housework, while I do the outdoor work, so I left him” (Case: 168/46).

Expulsion During the Husband's Absence: The absence of the male figure (e.g., departure for mandatory military service) opened up spaces for internal conflicts and the forced expulsion of the unwanted co-wife: “While he was in the army, his second wife drove me out” (Case: 200/46).

In contrast to these conflicts, the archival material also records rare, yet anthropologically fascinating examples of female solidarity and the formation of coalitions within the polygamous home. In these isolated cases, two or more wives united against the husband, locating him—rather than the rival—as the source of dysfunctionality:

“In another case, the husband sought a divorce because both had abandoned him due to disagreements with him. The women stated that the two of them got along, but they did not get along with him, as he was mostly absent from home and did not devote enough attention to them” (Case: 335/48).

Nonetheless, the chronology of intra-family life most frequently testifies to long-term endurance and the brutal violation of a woman's integrity following the introduction of a new wife. Documentation from the Bihać District Court and surrounding counties bears witness to extreme marital biographies and the serial nature of marital bonds:

“We lived together for about 20 years; I bore him 5 children. He brought a second wife, and I lived with her too for 3 years, but in the end, he drove me out” (Case: 283/52).

“We lived together for twenty-nine years, until he brought a second wife. I accepted and endured this one as well, even though he devoted all his attention to her. He abducted this woman from her husband, and she left behind her six children and four grandchildren” (Bihać District Court, Case: 270/52).

“Before the defendant, I had four lawful wives, but they abandoned me. After the defendant, I brought another, the sixth in a row” (Bihać District Court, Case: 133/47).

This legal and social anarchy culminated in procedural curiosities recorded before the post-war courts. Specifically, within the judicial practice of the Cazin Krajina, cases were registered where two women simultaneously, via a single joint lawsuit, initiated divorce proceedings against the same, shared husband, as well as the inverse legal modalities in which a husband demanded a simultaneous divorce from two of his

wives in a single filing.

15. Economic Determinism and Intra-Family Pathology: The Life History Method

Due to pronounced material deprivation, a chronic scarcity of basic resources, and a lack of residential space, specific and destructive forms of domestic violence developed within the multi-generational family cooperatives (zadrugas) of the Cazin Krajina. In this context, the figures of the co-wife (inoća), stepmother, and mother-in-law frequently functioned as primary agents of oppression. Once victims themselves of a rigid and exploitative patriarchal milieu, these women became aggressors under the influence of accumulated frustration and the struggle for resource dominance. They inflicted systematic psychological and physical torture upon the most vulnerable and unprotected members of the household—the husband’s children from previous marriages or daughters-in-law situated at the absolute bottom of the family hierarchy.

What emerges as a distinct research challenge during the fieldwork and data collection for this study is a conspicuous deficit of documentary sources and secondary data regarding domestic violence against children. This phenomenon testifies to a deeply embedded cultural taboo and a state of collective amnesia. Violence within the "four walls" of the home was treated as a strictly private sphere in which the community and neighbors did not intervene, thereby establishing a specific conspiracy of silence regarding family pathologies and leaving children completely at the mercy of their relatives.

The authentic life history of my mother, born in 1942 in the village of Gornja Vidovska, serves as a prime illustration of these processes. Recorded through the oral history method, this harrowing testimony completely deconstructs the harsh reality of everyday life in the Krajina during the mid-20th century:

“My mother was the third and youngest child when her father brought a second wife into their modest home. Due to spatial segregation, the father lived on the upper floor with the co-wife, while my mother, her sister, and her brother resided on the ground floor. As the father, under the influence of his new wife, completely marginalized and economically neglected the children from his first marriage—denying them basic necessities such as food—their biological mother, in a state of despair and helplessness, abandoned the home, leaving her two-year-old daughter and the other children with the husband.

During later years, my mother frequently evoked memories of the systematic torture they endured from their stepmother. While the three of them, treated as unwanted members, constantly slept on the floor, the stepmother’s biological children enjoyed a privileged status and slept in bed with her. The most harrowing fragment of this verbal abuse is reflected in the stepmother’s overt threat: 'I would slaughter all three of you with a knife right now if only I weren't afraid of the militia—but I am not afraid of God!'”

This anthropomorphic statement detects with exceptional precision the historical transition from a traditional to a modern legal system in the rural Krajina. The fear of metaphysical retribution (God), which had regulated moral norms for centuries, completely vanished under the impact of secularization and the penetration of a new state apparatus, replaced by the fear of state sanctions (the militia) and the loss of personal freedom. The law of the modern state became the sole instance preventing the physical liquidation of unwanted children.

The further instrumentalization of the child's body and economic exploitation manifested through the traditional pattern of wage labor. When she was only seven years old, her father and stepmother sent her out to work for an elderly married couple as a shepherdess and domestic helper. By this act, her childhood was completely abolished and instrumentalized for the purpose of generating direct material and financial gain for the primary family, validating the theory of the child as a mere economic resource under conditions of extreme scarcity.

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16. The Phenomenon of Marital Mobility, Dislocation, and Patrilocal Exilium

Further reconstruction of this life history indicates that the victimization cycle and the accumulated transgenerational trauma did not cease upon the victim's departure from the primary household, but were anticipated well into her adulthood. At the age of seventeen, driven by existential despair, a yearning for emancipation, and a basic escape from the hostile, stepmother-dominated environment, she entered into a marital union and underwent a process of geographic dislocation by moving to the village of Todorovo. A year later, by giving birth to a male offspring, she seemingly fulfilled the basic patriarchal imperative, which was supposed to secure her a minimum of social safety and integration within the new community.

However, a dramatic structural turn occurred due to a seemingly mundane economic act that disrupted the strict internal hierarchy and distribution of power within the family cooperative (zadruga). Her husband independently sold a sack of beans at a local fair to purchase a quilt. This minimal act of economic autonomy by the young married couple triggered a destructive reaction from his mother (the mother-in-law). In the traditional Krajina zadruga, the older woman—the mother-in-law—frequently functioned as a rigorous guardian of intra-family resources and economic stability. Pinpointing the daughter-in-law as the covert ideologue behind this subversive act and a threat to her own gynecocratic power, the mother-in-law applied the radical customary measure of expulsion (forcible eviction from the home).

The victim, carrying her one-year-old child in her arms, walked through a winter day, enduring the trauma of forced dislocation and disorientation while seeking refuge in her primary parental home. However, the scene of the meal around the family sofra (the traditional low table that in ethnology symbolizes familial cohesion and togetherness) brutally demythologized the figure of the biological father. Upon learning that his daughter had returned unaccompanied and without the approval of her husband, the father reacted in absolute alignment with the rigid code of the patrilocal marriage. From the perspective of this code, a daughter can be reintegrated into the primary home during times of crisis exclusively as free labor. On the other hand, her son—the grandson—as a legitimate member of someone else's lineage, someone else's patrilineal continuity, and someone else's family name, was radically dehumanized and rejected by the father's words:

“You can stay, but take that piece of shit back!”

This deep psychological shock and the absolute absence of parental empathy resulted in the victim's forced return to Todorovo, culminating in the final act of reproductive alienation and violent separation from the child. The collective and individual memory of this event is framed in a traumatic visual image of the child striking his hand

against the windowpane and calling out for his mother. This sequence remains a permanent, unhealed affective scar and a lifelong psychological trauma that determined her entire subsequent emotional life, bearing witness to the fact that a woman in the observed milieu was a mere object in power games, stripped of the right to her own motherhood.

FOOTNOTES / REFERENCES

(1) The remarkable tenacity, realization, and materialization of these intra-family fears within the local environment are also confirmed by the judicial chronicle of this region from a later period. Specifically, in the area of Velika Kladuša in the early 1980s, a horrific case was recorded in which Hata P. killed (slaughtered) the minor child of her husband from his previous marriage. The perpetrator was criminally prosecuted before the competent district court and sentenced to a long-term prison token for this severe offense. This historical excess and intra-family crime functioned within the local collective consciousness of the Cazin Krajina as a real, empirical confirmation and a subsequent rationalization of the fears that had been contained for generations within the verbal threats of stepmothers.

17. Economic Emancipation: Industrialization as a Catalyst for the Transformation of Marital Relations

The systematic subordination of the Krajina woman to her husband and his primary kin group (mother-in-law, brothers-in-law) was deeply rooted in her permanent economic isolation and exclusion from the flows of the monetary economy. Throughout a long historical period, women were completely marginalized from the public sphere and the formal labor market. Their role was strictly confined to the domestic space of the household and subsistence agricultural production, which in the traditional agro-cultural code was perceived as unpaid, taken-for-granted labor that generated no direct accumulation of capital. Under conditions of such radical economic dependence, a woman literally depended on the will and mercy of the pater familias even for the procurement of the most basic existential, medical, and hygienic necessities, providing men with an absolute lever of financial and existential control.

A radical turnabout in the self-awareness, habitus, and general social standing of the Krajina woman began in the early 1970s, with a wave of delayed but exceptionally intensive industrialization of the Cazin region. This process was primarily induced by the economic rise of regional textile, food, and commercial giants, among which the "Agrokomerc" conglomerate particularly stood out. The opening of mass factory plants and the dispersion of relocated production units across rural local communities created an urgent and massive need for female labor. For the first time in the region's history, this macroeconomic process enabled women from rural environments to exit the private sphere of the household and enter the public sphere of paid labor en masse.

The financial independence brought by a regular, individual wage fundamentally transformed the internal structure and dynamics of marriage. A woman who earned an income and brought liquid assets ("live money") into the home could no longer be treated as a passive object of discipline or seasonal discarding. Economic autonomy provided women not only with material security but also with deep psychological emancipation—it strengthened their bargaining power within the family, redefined traditional gender roles, and, most importantly, opened up a realistic possibility of leaving a dysfunctional or violent union. With the entry of women into the labor market and the acquisition of an economic alternative, the centuries-old patriarchal monopoly and the rigid structure of dominance in the Cazin Krajina began to rapidly collapse.

18. Conclusion: Between the Myth of the "Fierce Krajina Men" and the Culture of Trauma

The epithet “Fierce Krajina men” (Ljuti Krajišnici), which the inhabitants of the Cazin Krajina still inherit with pride and verbally reproduce within the framework of contemporary identity politics, represents a complex and multifaceted cultural construct. While on one hand this concept evokes historical pride in a warrior tradition, resistance, untamability, and the defense of geopolitical borders—alluding to epic heroes like Mujo Hrnjica or historical figures like Huska Miljković—its anthropological and sociological demystification reveals a dark, suppressed side of this mental code. That "fierceness" and rigidity, celebrated in heroic songs and oral epics, most frequently manifested in the private sphere of everyday life through chronic, structural, and brutal domestic violence.

The final analysis of this study poses a crucial question: is the permanent aggressiveness in the marital and family relations of the observed region merely the product of an expressive Krajina temperament shaped by harsh geographical conditions, or is it nonetheless a classic social phenomenon of a culture of trauma?

The ethnographic, archival, and judicial material analyzed in this paper unequivocally points to the latter. Aggression against women and children within the Krajina family was not an innate character or genetic trait, but a dysfunctional defense mechanism and a byproduct of the multigenerational, cumulative traumatization of the collective. A people who for centuries lived on a permanent military crossroads of clashing empires, exposed to extreme destitution, periodic famines, forced marriages, and radical emotional deprivation from earliest childhood, internalized violence as the only valid language of communication and maintaining control within the community.

Through transgenerational transmission, the trauma caused by historical, political, and economic collapses was channeled where resistance was weakest—into the family microcosm, across the backs of the woman and the child. The transformation of marital relations at the end of the 20th century, triggered by late industrialization and economic emancipation, represents only the first step toward the deconstruction of this traumatic code, leaving space for contemporary society to scientifically recognize, articulate, and heal the deep scars of its own past.

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